THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

VOL. VII, No. 8 | UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND—COLLEGE PARK, MD. | NOVEMBER, 1945

"English Language In American Education"

The CEA owes a debt of thanks to Professors Thomas Clark Pollock, William Clyde DeVane, and Robert E. Spiller, authors of the report to the Modern Language Association on "The English Language in American Education." The report should serve to correct many fallacies that are abroad regarding the teaching of English. It admits frankly that many graduates of high schools cannot read or write satisfactorily, but denies the assumption that there are no possibilities of improving the English of "non-academic" students.

Professor Pollock meets the educators on their own grounds and begins with the principles of psychology and language which underlie speaking, reading, and writing. He shows that language is a complex activity which involves all the higher powers of the mind. Vocabulary, he proves, is related to all of one's experiences. Grammar does not have automatic functional value. Linguistic ability grows with the general growth of the student. All will agree with his emphasis on the importance of repetition in forming habits of correct speaking and writing and habits of going to books for pleasure and information.

Especially appreciated is the refutation of "What the High Schools Ought to Teach." The MLA committee proves that students are not leaving the high schools because of the nature of the curriculum but because of economic reasons. It denies that high school students can be divided into two groups: (a) those who are going to college and (b) those who are not. Both groups need ability in the use of English. Not to attempt to raise the educational level of the entire population is little less than a crime against democracy. That some students have not been educated does not mean they cannot be educated.

The last section of the report on the "English Language In The Elementary School" and "The Secondary School" should be especially helpful to educational administrators. Here the authors come to grips with the problem of remedial reading and the vocational needs of students.

The committee recommends that the preparation of the teacher of English include the study of at least one foreign language. It calls for state department standards which will be qualitative, as well as quantitative in terms of semester-hours. Wherever possible, an examination which tests ability and mastery rather than the amount of time spent in learning should be substituted for present requirements.

All members of the CEA will do well to study this pamphlet and keep their salt in savor.

J. Gordon Eaker.

Vox Populi

"A man is known by the company he keeps." "In union there is strength." "Forewarned is forearmed." "A fool and his money are soon parted." "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." These sayings and many more are heard and used daily. They are "of the people" and "from the people."

Like good government, they cannot be superimposed from the top, but must bear the stamp of the multitude. James Howell, a productive writer of the seventeenth century, invented five hundred witty sayings which he included in his collection of proverbs brought out in 1659 "to serve for common prosperity." But his coinages did not have the sanction of the crowd and have therefore remained within the covers of his book, whereas many of the proverbs which he termed "the truest franklins or freeholders of a country" have continued in general circulation. Nonetheless, Howell was one of the first to emphasize that the proverbs belong to the people. He wrote:

"The peoples voice, the Voice of God we call,
And what are Proverbs but the peoples voice?
Coin'd first, and current made by common choice,
Then sure they must have Weight and Truth withall."

(Proverbs and Old Sayed Sawes and Adages, sig. aIV, verso.)

A saying may have brevity, sense, and "salt", but it must have popularity and it must stand the test of time. Every proverb must have an author, even though, paradoxically enough, he has often passed into oblivion as the people have accepted his creation. A proverb is in this sense, in the words of Lord Russel, "the wit of one and the wisdom of many".

Because of the active part pro-

Continued on Page Three

Shakespeare On Time

Inscrutable Shakespeare shared his friend Touchstone's liking to "moral on Time,"—and thereby hangs his fondness for the word "Time."

Recall, say, xty of his unforgettable passages, and you will note that many of them exemplify this habit. Did not Adison esteem "the last syllable of recorded Time" as the noblest trope in literature?

Earlier poets had moraled on Derringer-Do, on Human wretchedness, loyalty, curtuisie, Parsifal and Galahad, Love, Godliness, the Life of the Rose; but the majesty of Time had not yet been pushed into the common ken by astronomers and round-the-world voyagers. As meat for chewing it was new.

Because every man must borrow his figuers of speech from his ruling interests,—be they sailing the Sea, Philosophy, or racing horses,—one might expect to find this theme harped on by the learned authors of the age.—Marlowe was from Cambridge. In EDWARD II, "Time" makes 12 appearances; in its analogue, RICHARD II, 49. (In FACSTUS, 12). Shakespeare puts 78 "Times" in 154 Sonnets (yet shuns the word in the last 27,—which may or may not have to do with a Dark Lady). Scholarly Milton's Lycidas, Il Penseroso, and L'Allegro have the word only once. The first 4 books of Paradise Lost have 3,600 lines and 16 "Times;" but HAMLET, which is of similar length (and which, like Faustus, is a study of Mediaeval soul in torment) uses the word 52 times. In The Alchemist, Duchess of Malfi, and Philastar there are 66 "times," —in HENRY IV and MACBETH more than 160. (N.B. The foregoing numbers are often, but never very, wrong).

As a rule, W. S. gives the word to personae whose mental traits or kinds took his fancy, and, also as a rule, it is oftenest met in the plays that you most enjoy reading and that he, perhaps, most enjoyed writing. For exceptions there is usually an obvious explanation:—LEAR (32) and TITUS ANDRONICUS (8) live among Sabre-toothed Tigers, before Time was invented, while in MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (15) and THE TEMPEST (23) the best characters are as

Continued on Page Two

The treasurer will be glad to hear from all members who have not paid their current dues.

American Civilization At University Of Maryland

In 1944, at the recommendation of President H. C. Byrd, the faculty of the University of Maryland began extensive plans for a program of studies in American Civilization stressing the social and humanistic disciplines.

The program as now organized embraces required work for freshmen and sophomores, a combined major-minor plan for juniors and seniors, and graduate studies. All students in the University—normally during their first two years—complete one-half year of American government, one-half year of sociology, a year of composition with reading in American literature, a year of composition with readings in foreign literature, and a year of American history. These basic courses are planned as parts of a carefully conceived whole, the integration being effected through the organization of the courses and through classroom procedures. Less than half of a student's work during his first two years is included in the program. Courses must be elected in other subjects also important in fitting students for citizenship and leadership.

The course in sociology aims to be a balanced introduction to the sociology of American life, a thing scarcely available at present. The course in American government emphasizes the role of the citizen in his day-to-day relations with his governments; it analyzes the constitutional sources of authority and the party system. By tracing significant social, political, and economic developments, the course in history intends to show how a great, unified, democratic nation was forged. It is believed that an understanding of the processes by which American democratic thought has grown will carry with it an awareness that democracy and a free way of life are worth maintaining in the face of any opposition.

The courses in literature and language serve a variety of purposes. They serve as a matter of course the conventional objectives of training for effectiveness in writing and for appreciative understanding in reading. Beyond this, the work relates wherever practicable to the general objectives of the program in American Civilization.

Continued on Page Three

THE NEWS LETTER

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Burges Johnson

The retirement of Burges Johnson from the affairs of the College English Association could be an extreme calamity such as we have in mind when we speak of **Hamlet** without Hamlet. Mr. Johnson must not be missed that much. It is a luxury to miss him, because in a sense he is irreplaceable. His liberality, his wit, and his sweetness of temper—in what other single man may these be found? But the ranks of the Association, by closing, must discover the nearest thing possible to their equivalent, whether in one man or in many. The memory of his service assisting, the Association has that for its first task. —Mark Van Doren.

Editorial . . .

The College English Association is now seven years old. In large measure it owes its origin, its development, its character to the labor and devotion of Burges Johnson. For their own advantage and that of the profession, for the benefit of liberal studies, and as a tribute to their generous-hearted first executive secretary, the members should strengthen their Association. With a hearty Amen to President Van Doren's plea that we need the nearest equivalent to Professor Johnson, the new secretary pledges his interest and energy and accepts the challenge to "put up a good fight for English as the bulwark of a general education, as the keystone in the arch of liberal studies."

He agrees with Professor Canby that CEA "has not even begun to do its work." A most important part of that task is the "study of the essential work of college English departments" now being made by Professor Foerster's committee. But in a larger sense, must not college English teachers resume control of college English teaching? They have listened too long while others told them what they were supposed to do and how they are supposed to do it. Moreover, if English is to continue as the keystone of the arch, should not CEA ponder these questions, too?

Do English teachers live in ivory towers? Do they ignore their students' needs and interests? What should be their relation to other departments? What should they do to make English training continuous from secondary school through college? Does the training of English teachers fit them to teach composition and to interpret literature to undergraduates? What proportion of English classes are taught by poorly paid, overworked, inexperienced teachers? Do present conditions encourage effective teaching in the large majority of English classes? What influence do present policies of promotion have on the teaching of undergraduate English? How should English study be adapted for students of various abilities and interests? Until English department policy reflects satisfactory answers to these problems, can English be the bulwark of a general education?

All college English teachers should unite as a profession if the position of all is not to deteriorate, and the College English Association, to do its work well, must have a wide and representative membership. Its policies should be discussed in every English department, and its publication should reflect all the problems of English teaching. It might well organize more regional or local groups. At $2.00 a year, why should not all teachers of college English support the independent Association through which they can exchange ideas and champion their cause?

"The chief value of the News Letter lies, I think, in the fact that it furnishes a medium for what you might call honest off-the-record, off-the-pedestal expressions of opinion on our common problems. We really need more of that sort of thing."

Clarence Thorpe,
University of Michigan.

For Members Only

For members only, the NEWS LETTER will henceforth print keyed notices of availability and will put interested parties in touch with one another. The NEWS LETTER will also be glad to print for any administrative officer the notice of a vacancy or of a prospective opening in English. Notices should be brief. For the time being, at least, there will be no charge.

Teacher Available

Man, 39, married, Ph. D., Phi Beta Kappa. Sixteen years experience. Publications. Medieval and nineteenth century specialist. Position wanted in Central Eastern United States. A1

Personals . . .

Robert E. Spiller moved from Swathmore College to the University of Pennsylvania this fall.

Kendall B. Taft, Professor of American Literature at the new Roosevelt College of Chicago, has promised an account of Roosevelt for an early issue of the News Letter. He is director of an Institute of American Culture at the college—six sessions from October 19, 1945, through January 9, 1946. 231 S. Wells Street, Chicago 4.

Norman Foerster resigned as director of the School of Letters at Iowa in July 1944, and has been living in Chapel Hill, N. C., since June 1945. he University of North Carolina Press is bringing out November 10: **The Humanities and the Common Man:** The Democratic Role of the State University.

Burges Johnson failed to shake down Mobiloil for a bond on the November 5 Information Please program, Boris Karloff making the out unassisted.

The editor hopes that members will supply him with material for a column of Personals, and that they will send in general news of interest to the Association. The editor will be glad to publish it as straight news, without a by-line, if they desire. He will also welcome brief critical articles. Until the **News Letter** increases in size, it must continue the present limit of 1000 words for contributions. In connection with Professor Eaker's suggestion in this issue, would the membership like a book column partly of their own contributions and partly of notes about books of professional interest to teachers?

"I feel very strongly that the College English Association should continue, and believe that it has vitality enough to do so....I do believe that the News Letter should be continued."

Milton Ellis, University of Maine

"I've Been Reading"

If we are not to neglect the writers of our day, is there nothing to do but flounder hopelessly among them all, sifting volumes of chaff for a few grains? The makers of anthologies of current writers have helped much, for the twentieth century is rapidly nearing its central year, and will soon take its place alongside the eighteenth and nineteenth in our catalogues of courses. But are we going to let a vocal minority determine which ones will become famous? Sometimes history is a pack of tricks which we play upon the dead.

My suggestion is that through the columns of the CEA News Letter we let our colleagues know when we find a current book worthy of wide reading and worthy of mentioning in our literature classes, and not only in contemporary literature classes, either.

What would you recommend to your son, if he should say that he had some time on his hands this summer? What are the books that have really added to your mental stature in your recent reading? How about a column with many contributors, "I've Been Reading"? It is said that the main need of English teachers is time to do the reading that made them want to become teachers of English in the first place. Is that true? What have you been reading that I might like?—J. Gordon Eaker.

SHAKESPEARE

Continued from First Page

aloof from Time as is the Binomial Theorem.

Consider how you would, naturally, have phrased the King's, "I wasted Time, and now doth Time waste me," or the Prince's, "The Times are out of joint," or the Lover's, "When in the chronicle of wasted Time," or the Fool's "moraling on Time."

If a College Class in English were turned loose on taking a census of this term in the writings of W.S.,—1) The word, 2) the combination-forms, 3) the meanings implicit, 4) the types of personality to whom the word is assigned, 5) the frequency of the word in accepted and in "dubious" plays,—for once he would abide our questions because he has written the answers.

In Time-thought the year 1600 had taken few, tottering steps on the path that led to Bishop Usher, to Immanuel Kant, and to Light-moraling on this dawning concept Years. Perhaps Shakespeare's was as fascinating to his audience as dim pre-views of Television or of a New Dimension are to us.

W. J. Boardman,
Sarasota, Fla.

THE WHITE PAPER

This issue is printed on white paper because the new printer could not secure the shade to which members have been accustomed. He reports a greater difficulty in securing paper than when rationting was in effect. Do the members wish to return to the shade which has become traditional or do they prefer white? Do they have any suggestions about the form of their publication?

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CIVILIZATION

Continued from First Page

The readings for the first year, which are notable American writings in various genres, are studied intensively for ideas that they present. As some of the expository documents constitute primary source materials for the basic studies in government, sociology, and history, discussions touch naturally on topics that are treated extensively in these connected courses. Readings in fiction, drama, and verse illuminate American life with clear immediacy.

In the second year, there is a shift in emphasis. Continuing attention is devoted to practice in writing, but increased emphasis is given to training in reading. The works read are mainly masterpieces from foreign literatures and are studied first of all as aesthetic formulations. In addition, however, to stressing a general appreciation of value, the course emphasizes cultural links between American civilization and other great civilizations.

At the junior senior-level, the program becomes a plan of study for students who choose to major in American Civilization. Advanced courses in American literature and American history are now required of all majors. Work in English literature is required of students electing to stress literature. Normally, most elective courses are in English, history, foreign languages, comparative literature, economics, sociology, political science, and philosophy; but it is possible for a student to fulfill the requirements of the program and to elect as many as twenty-four hours in such subjects as art and psychology, provided that, in the opinion of an official adviser, such work fits into a carefully planned whole.

A feature of the work for majors is a year's conference course required of seniors. The course is synthetic in nature; it demands of the student that he organize his knowledge of American civilization and bring it to bear upon the study and discussion of eight or ten germinal books. In the conference the student assists in the analysis of volumes which reflect the complex, many-faceted, yet unified nature of American civilization.

Advanced studies leading to the degrees of Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy in American Civilization are intended to prepare the student for teaching, for further study, and for research in the general field of American Civilization, but with emphasis (for the present) on one of two disciplines: history, including European backgrounds; or literature, including European literature, particularly English.—Guy A. Cardwell, Head, Department of English, and Chairmain, Committee on American Civilization, University of Maryland

VOX POPULI

Continued from First Page

verbs play in the life of a people, the collecting of them is an excellent project in a course in composition, for the students feel as if they are working with something that is alive and touches them. Each member of the class should be asked to collect a definite number of proverbial sayings overheard in conversation. One hundred is a reasonable figure and one large enough to give him some idea of their importance and significance in our language.

In order to give the student some idea of methodology, he should be asked to record each saying, exactly as he heard it, in quotation marks on a 3x5 card or slip with the key word of the saying in the upper left corner and the name of the state from which the contributor originally came in the upper right corner.

The student should explain any saying that is not obvious by giving the meaning just below it. He should also give any variant that he may know or any other interesting information that he may hear or find. If it is a proverb that is typically Norwegian, German, French, Spanish, Italian, or of any foreign origin, that fact should be recorded. Religious groups, as well as nationalities, sometimes have sayings which are peculiarly their own. If the student hears a saying that belongs to any special group, religious, political, national, industrial, or otherwise, that fact should be written on the card.

The teacher may also include written sources as well as oral, and thereby give the student some idea of making a bibliography and of writing footnotes. Proverbial lore can be found in regional literature and in travel books, journals, and magazines where professional writers make deliberate and authentic use of folk materials; also in almanacs, newspapers, and other publications where local and popular tales and anecdotes are recorded.

The next step of the student may be an analysis or classification of his findings.

Finally, each student should prepare a report telling the methods used in compiling the list of the material collected and evaluating the project as a whole. In presenting the report, the student should also hand in the hundred cards or slips alphabetized.

I have found this assignment very useful; students enjoy it and at the same time learn something about the language and about research. If any who read this article should use the idea, I as Chairman of a committee for collecting proverbial saying for the American Dialect Society should like them to send me the sayings which their students assemble. The Society is looking forward to publishing a **Dictionary of American Proverbs**, but no dictionary was ever made without the voluntary assistance of many people who take an interest and pass on their information and suggestions. The students who collect proverbs might obtain added stimulation from the work if they know it may have a usefulness beyond their own classroom and become a part, however small, of an American project in scholarship.

Margaret M. Bryant,
Brooklyn College

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Tryout Theatre

Dear Editor:

The most difficult of the writing courses to teach is that in playwriting. The play needs the touch of life that production gives. It also needs the merciless, impartial judgment of a paying audience.

University theatres and Community theatres are hesitant about doing a new play. For one thing, it has little advertising value, and, for another, a group often feels that a play which has had a successful run on Broadway will draw better audiences. Moreover, directors too often have little experience in judging new plays and hesitate to develop new productions. New plays are a headache to the technicians in a theatre. There are many reasons not to do new plays and only one really good reason to do them: the entire vitality of the theatre has to start with the playwright.

Tryout Theatre, a community group which works amicably with the University theatres and the Seattle Repertory Company, was founded to develop plays and test them for the playwright. It is a sixty seat theatre with a stage almost as large as the audience space. It was founded by a group of teachers and university graduates who wanted to work with new plays. Audiences came because they too were willing to take a chance on the new play. After a careful screening of plays available, the Tryout Theatre puts a play in rehearsal with the best available cast. Because preference is given the local playwrights, often the author is there to work with the show from the beginning to the end. He makes changes during the course of the rehearsals and, if it seems desirable, during the actual run of the show. Each play is given from twelve to twenty performances in order that the playwright may have the benefit of a number of different audiences. Evereyone who sees the play is asked to comment on it. After the run is over, the cast and the members of Tryout Theatre meet with the author for a full discussion. The real thrill of the work comes when the author sends in his revised version of the play.

To date Tryout Theatre has done ten new shows and has the eleventh in rehearsal. Of the ten, one has been published by Macmillan's; one is now under option for Broadway production; two have had further non-professional production; several have interested professional producers and the movies. Eight of the playwrights were enrolled or had been enrolled in classes at the University; two were University faculty members. None had had previous professional production.

Students in dramatic composition have been urged to work with the theatre to learn the processes of production. From this interest, many have started more ambitious plays and hope eventually to write one that will be selected for professional production.

The English Department and the teachers in writing have given their full support to the theatre both through suggestion and criticism and through helping on such unprofessorial things as calcimining, painting, making signs, acting.

Founders thought of the theatre as helping the playwright. Playwrights gratefully acknowledge that help. But it is a help to others in the theatre. Since Tryout Theatre started, we have had our directors placed at University of New Mexio, Pasadena Playhouse, Grinnell College, University of Michigan (Summer). Our actors have found a place for themselves in other community theatres as they moved from place to place under war-time pressures.

If anyone is interested in establishing a similar theatre or in recommending a new play to us, we shall be interested in answering communications.

George Savage,
University of Washington.

Seminar On Reading Disabilities

The Annual Seminar on Reading Disabilities will be conducted by the Reading Clinic, Department of Psychology, Temple University, from January 28 to February 1, 1946. Lectures, demonstrations, and discussions will be used to develop the central theme: **Differentiated Remedial and Corrective Reading.**

Advanced registration is required. For further information regarding the one-week Seminar, write to Dr. E. A. Betts, Director of the Reading Clinic, Temple University, Philadelphia 22, Pennsylvania.

MEETINGS

A CEA luncheon is being planned for one of the days of the M.L.A. meeting in Chicago. Definite announcement will appear in the December issue.

The secretary suggested to President Van Doren, who endorsed the suggestion, that the Association have a meeting in the New York area late in January or early in February. Is there any objection? Do we hear any suggestions for a program?

"I think Professor A. P. Hudson is right that the News Letter always gets on-the-spot attention. I think we should continue to keep it short, frequent, and readable."

J. Gordon Eaker,
Kansas State Teachers' College.

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